

Guess Who

He has two hearts and hates Daleks. That's right – Doctor Who is back. TV WEEK's Jo McKay visited the set for a sneak preview

DOCTOR WHO (SERIES RETURN)

Saturday, 7.30pm, ABC

Some of you will remember him well: a 900-year-old Gallifreyan time lord travelling through time and space to save Earth and countless other planets from destruction.

Others will remember him less favourably: an eccentric, scarf-wearing "alien", rattling around on unstable sets.

It was 1989 when the classic British series came to the end of its 26-year run and seemed destined to fade into cult TV obscurity.

Now The Doctor is back – and his much-anticipated return is surrounded by questions. The set in Wales is shrouded in secrecy: all visitors, especially journalists, must prove their identity and sign

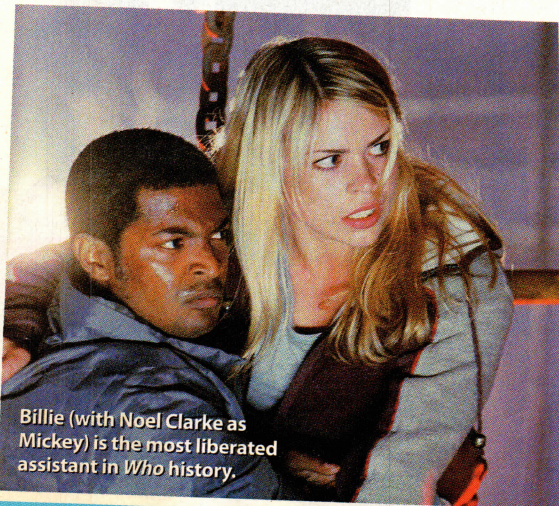


Russell has given the classic *Doctor Who* an update.

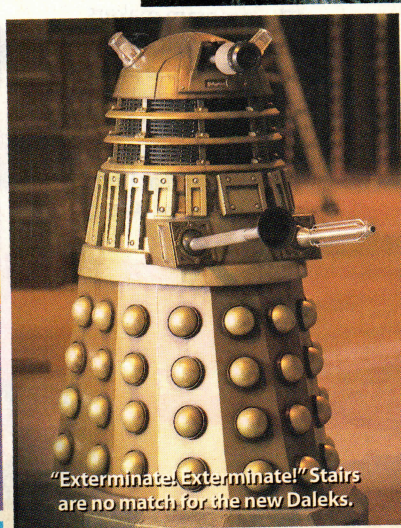
confidentiality forms. It's all a bit cloak-and-dagger, which is understandable. After all, there are stories of *Who* fanatics posing as journalists and crew just to get close to the action.

There's so much mystery surrounding this new series – will it be the rightful return of *Who* that the old fans are hoping for, or will it be a complete change?

Executive producer and writer Russell T Davies answers the question straightaway: "This is no reboot. This is the same old *Doctor Who* – a time



Billie (with Noel Clarke as Mickey) is the most liberated assistant in *Who* history.



"Exterminate! Exterminate!" Stairs are no match for the new Daleks.



The new series promises better special effects – which wouldn't be too hard!

's back?

The new series promises to touch on the relationship between The Doctor and Rose.

lord with a Tardis travelling in time and space."

At the same time, Russell admits, it was a chance for a new start. With Christopher Eccleston (best known for the TV series *Cracker* and the film *28 Days Later*) as The Doctor and former pop star Billie Piper playing his companion Rose Tyler, the new *Who* has more promise from the outset.

As The Doctor, Christopher is no eccentric Tom Baker. He is cooler, wittier and less alien-like than the eight time lords before him. No long, multi-coloured scarves or Edwardian coats for him; he wears a leather jacket and jeans. He speaks with a northern accent, his Tardis is less cluttered but bigger, and he's abandoned the physics techno-babble which was so clumsy in previous series.

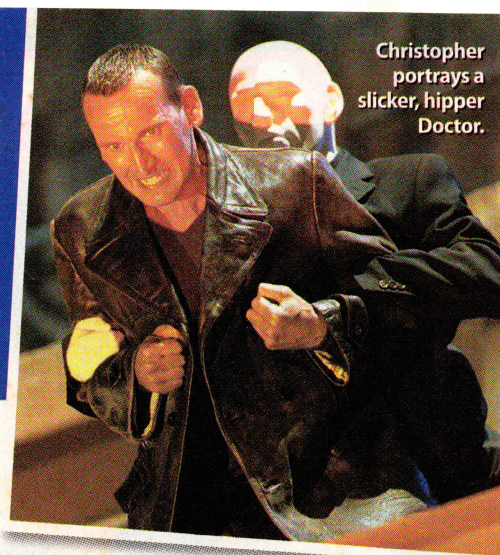
And Billie is a breath of fresh air for *Doctor Who*. Fans will remember the previous companions being dumbed down. Not this one; Rose is intrepid, brave and ballsy. She speaks her mind and educates The Doctor.

"He can be as cold as ice at times and Rose finds that hard to deal with," Billie explains, "but he learns a lot about humanity through her."

But the main change is in the relationship between The Doctor and Rose. This new series "is a story of a human and an alien relationship", explains Russell.

"He is wise and wonderful and strange; she is ordinary and down-to-earth and brave. Together they complete each other. They make a perfect team," he says.

The BBC has ploughed millions of pounds into this production, and rightly so.



Christopher portrays a slicker, hipper Doctor.

This *Who* is not going to be blighted by cardboard backgrounds, bad plastic monsters and incoherent techno-speak.

The special effects are better, the acting spot-on and the characters more developed. The Doctor actually has feelings this time and he and Rose share their experiences intimately. Every episode leaves a lingering question: will they or won't they?

Billie admits the relationship is one "you can't ever put your finger on. There's a lot of holding hands. It's however you choose to perceive it. There has never been a relationship like this between The Doctor and his assistant."

It is this new sense of emotion that makes it so real.

"It's always brought back to Earth," Christopher says. "It's not about fighting aliens on the planet Zog. It's about real people."

But one thing remains: The Doctor is always changing. Christopher decided not to sign on for a second series, so a new time lord will step into the role – David Tennant from the film *Bright Young Things* – and hopefully live up to the witty benchmark Christopher has established.

This *Who* was not made for the existing fans – it's designed to bring in younger viewers. While you probably won't be hiding behind the sofa, your kids certainly might be. But they will also giggle – and that means Russell has lived up to his promise to make this new *Who* "fun, exciting, contemporary and scary".